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SUNSHINE POST

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HEALTHY AGING 12

On a warm evening in southwest Florida, as the sun slips behind the palms and the Caloosahatchee River turns copper, a small group of people gathers around a folding table.

February is approaching, and our house in the Lüneburg Heath has transformed into a logistics center. In one corner, nine suitcases are piled up—this is the luggage that will accompany us on the plane.

On a warm evening in southwest Florida, as the sun slips behind the palms and the Caloosahatchee River turns copper, a small group of people gathers around a folding table.



Valentine's Day in Florida

Valentine's Day in the United States is like a marching band announcing that love has officially arrived—and it has brought glitter, ribbons, and confetti.

It is not a quiet affair. This holiday sparkles, declares itself boldly, and invites everyone to participate. For Europeans, such openness can feel overwhelming—yet it offers a fascinating glimpse into how Americans understand and celebrate love.

Long before February 14th, love becomes visible everywhere. Daily life glows in shades of red and pink. Hearts appear in shop windows, on greeting cards, in classrooms—even at the dental office. Love is written, wrapped, and displayed—joyful, expressive, and meant to be shared and seen.

Read more about Valentine's Day in the Sunshine State on Page 7

Celebrate the Month of Love with Us!

Dear Readers,
February may be the shortest month of the year, but it's one of the richest in heart. As winter slowly begins to loosen its grip and Valentine's Day approaches, this edition is all about connection between neighbors, families, traditions, and even generations.

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SUNSHINE POST

HERO OF THE MONTH

Do you know someone who makes our community a better place?



A neighbor, a volunteer, a mentor or just someone whose kindness inspires others? We at Sunshine Post would love to share their story.

Nominate your Hero of the Month today and help us shine a light on the people who truly make a difference.

Send us your suggestion at info@sunshine-post.com. Let's celebrate the everyday heroes among us together.



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A Little Love Goes a Long Way

Dear Readers,

February may be the shortest month of the year, but it's one of the richest in heart. As winter slowly begins to loosen its grip and Valentine's Day approaches, this edition is all about connection between neighbors, families, traditions, and even generations.

At *Sunshine Post*, we believe that community is built on care, trust, and shared stories. That spirit continues in the fifth episode of our ongoing series on the historical origins of Credit Unions, where we look back at how cooperation and mutual support helped communities thrive and why those values still matter today.

Of course, February also invites us to celebrate love in all its forms. Whether you're planning a romantic evening, a cozy night in, or simply looking for thoughtful ways to show appreciation, our Valentine's Day tips offer inspiration for meaningful moments that don't have to be extravagant to be special.

Quality journalism for everyone. Find the Sunshine Post at many locations across Cape Coral and Fort Myers.

And because love often starts in the kitchen, our Recipe of the Month brings a delightful surprise: a famous German classic that has stood the test of time. It's comforting, delicious, and perfect for any occasion: just the kind of dish that turns a meal into an experience.

This issue is a reminder that love isn't only about grand gestures. It's found in lending a hand, sharing a meal, preserving traditions, and showing up for one another. As you turn these pages, we hope you feel inspired, connected, and reminded that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference.

From all of us here, we wish you a February filled with warmth, togetherness, and plenty of love.

With heartfelt thanks,

Rouven Zietz
Editor-in-Chief

Sunshine Post

Editor-in-Chief/Managing Editor
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The Kindness: A Message in Motion

Sometimes, kindness doesn't begin with a grand decision. It begins quietly — on the road, at a red light, in everyday motion. We often believe that doing good requires extra time, careful planning, or a conscious effort beyond our daily routines. Yet sometimes, kindness is already woven into the lives we lead. Commuting to work. Driving the kids to school. Running errands around town. What if even those everyday miles could carry meaning?

In Florida, they can.

Specialty license plates offer a way to support meaningful causes without changing your schedule or habits. With every drive, they turn a vehicle into a visible message — a gentle reminder of what matters to you, and perhaps a quiet nudge to someone driving just behind you.

MORE THAN A PLATE — A VISIBLE COMMITMENT

At first glance, a license plate appears purely functional. But Florida's specialty plates are designed to do more than identify a vehicle. Each one represents a specific cause or organization and contributes directly to its work through designated registration fees.

Choosing such a plate means that support doesn't happen just once. It continues year after year, mile after mile. Over time, these contributions help fund conservation projects, educational initiatives, community programs, and awareness efforts across the state.

Just as important as the financial impact is visibility.

Specialty plates keep important topics present in everyday life. They spark curiosity, invite questions, and make values visible without explanation or persuasion. In that quiet repetition, awareness grows.

PROTECTING NATURE AND WILDLIFE

Florida's natural environment is one of its greatest treasures — and one of its most vulnerable. Several specialty license plates are dedicated to protecting wildlife and preserving natural habitats.

Some focus on iconic species such as sea turtles, manatees, or the Florida panther. Others support broader wildlife conservation efforts, helping to protect ecosystems, fund research, and ensure long-term sustainability. These plates clearly reflect their purpose through both name and design, making the cause immediately recognizable.

Driving with one of these plates means carrying a message for the natural world — a steady, visible reminder that conservation is not an abstract idea, but an ongoing responsibility.

HEALTH AWARENESS — SEEN AND REMEMBERED

Other specialty plates are dedicated to health-related awareness and support. These include plates associated with clearly identifiable health or research initiatives, where the plate itself represents the cause it supports.

Beyond contributing financially, these plates serve another essential role: they keep awareness present long after designated campaigns or awareness months have passed. They remind us that health challenges are not temporary headlines, but realities many people live with every day.

For some, these plates reflect personal experiences. For others, they signal solidarity. In both cases, they turn recognition into something visible — and lasting.

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORTING SERVICE

Kindness also means looking after one another — and Florida's specialty license plates reflect that responsibility in tangible ways.

Several publicly available plates support community-based organizations whose names and missions are clearly represented on the plate itself. These include initiatives focused on mentoring and supporting children and young people, educational and youth development programs, and organizations that work closely with families during challenging life situations.

In addition, there are specialty plates dedicated to military and veteran-focused programs that are open to everyone — not only to those who have served. By choosing these plates, drivers can actively contribute to services that support veterans and their families while making that support visible in everyday life.

What unites all of these plates is clarity: the organization or mission they support is recognizable, their impact is measurable, and their message is carried forward with every mile driven.

WHY IT MATTERS

There are many ways to give: donating money, volunteering time, offering skills. All of them are valuable. Specialty license plates add something different — continuity.

They allow kindness to exist in motion. They normalize support. They make values visible in ordinary, shared spaces.

They quietly say: This matters to me. And sometimes, that is exactly where change begins.

CHOOSING WHAT SPEAKS TO YOU

You don't need to know every organization in advance. Florida provides a centralized overview of all available specialty license plates, making it easy to explore different causes and discover what resonates most with you.

Some people choose based on personal connection. Others follow their values or curiosity. There is no right or wrong choice — only the one that feels genuine.

And yes, choosing just one can be surprisingly difficult. Because once you start looking, you realize how many causes deserve attention.

A SMALL CHOICE WITH LASTING IMPACT

A license plate will not change the world on its own. But it can change how we move through it. It reminds us — and those around us — that kindness doesn't always require extra effort. Sometimes, it simply travels with us. Mile after mile.

Finding your specialty plate

Where to look:

Florida's official overview of all Specialty License Plates: <https://www.flhsmv.gov/motor-vehicles-tags-titles/personalized-specialty-license-plates/>

How it works:

Browse available specialty plates and supported causes
Choose the plate that resonates with you
Order it during vehicle registration or renewal

Support your chosen cause automatically through your registration fee

Why it matters:

You contribute continuously — and visibly — simply by driving.

By Jennifer Hagemeyer

VIKTORIA'S HOME

WE ALWAYS GO ONE STEP FURTHER

What happens when a remarkable designer
works with the world's finest furniture?



VIKTORIA'S HOME – EUROPEAN DESIGN EXCELLENCE.



The Cooperative Horizon: What Credit Unions Could Become in the Next 50 Years

On a warm evening in southwest Florida, as the sun slips behind the palms and the Caloosahatchee River turns copper, a small group of people gathers around a folding table. There's iced tea sweating in plastic cups, a whiteboard leaning against a pickup truck, and a conversation that sounds suspiciously radical for modern finance.

"What if," someone asks, "a financial institution actually belonged to the people who used it — not just legally, but emotionally?"

The group laughs. Then they stop laughing. Because the question isn't theoretical. It's practical. And, if history is any guide, potentially revolutionary.

For more than a century, credit unions have thrived quietly on the margins of American finance — born in church basements, union halls, and immigrant neighborhoods; weathering depressions, deregulation, digital disruption, and distrust. They survived not because they were the biggest, fastest, or richest, but because they were useful, trusted, and human.

Now, as the financial world hurtles toward automation, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic decision-making, credit unions are facing their most important question yet:

What comes next?

The End of "Normal" Banking

For decades, the future of finance was described as inevitable: fewer branches, fewer humans, more automation, more efficiency. Banking executives spoke breathlessly about "frictionless experiences" and "customer journeys," while quietly increasing fees and outsourcing decision-making to models no one fully understood.

Then something unexpected happened. People got tired. Tired of overdraft fees triggered by algorithms.

Tired of customer service chatbots that never solved anything.

Tired of being declined for loans with no explanation — or worse, approved for loans they couldn't afford.

Tired of financial systems that seemed designed to extract value rather than build it.

Trust, already fragile after the 2008 financial crisis, cracked further during the pandemic. Banks closed branches just when people needed help. Fintech apps grew fast — and collapsed just as quickly. Crypto exchanges promised freedom and delivered chaos.

In the rubble, credit unions found themselves standing — not triumphant, but steady.

And for the first time in decades, the question wasn't

In the end, the story of credit unions has always been the same story, told in different eras.

The Quiet Advantage No One Can Copy

Credit unions possess something no amount of venture capital can buy: structural alignment with their members.

They do not exist to maximize quarterly earnings.

They do not sell user data.

They do not answer to shareholders demanding growth at any cost.

This alignment is not a branding exercise. It's baked into their DNA.

In the next 50 years, that alignment may become the single most valuable asset in finance.

Why?

Because technology has made everything else replicable.

Apps can be copied.

Interest rates can be matched.

User interfaces can be cloned.

But trust — earned slowly, locally, over time — cannot.

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From Financial Products to Financial Companionship

The future of credit unions is not about becoming better banks. It's about becoming something else entirely. Imagine a financial institution that does not merely provide products, but accompanies people through life. Not in a creepy, data-harvesting way — but in a cooperative one.

A place that understands that money is not an abstract game, but a tool tangled up with stress, dreams, family, health, and dignity.

In this future:

- A first-time borrower doesn't just get a loan — they get coaching, flexibility, and context.
- A small business owner doesn't just get credit — they get a partner who wants the business to succeed, not fail profitably.
- A retiree doesn't just get an account — they get guidance that prioritizes stability over speculation.

Some credit unions are already moving this direction, quietly reframing themselves not as financial vendors, but as member advocates.

The next step is scaling that idea — without losing the human touch.

A Glimpse of What's Coming

If you listen carefully in certain circles — cooperative planners, community organizers, technologists disillusioned with Big Tech finance — you'll hear whispers.

Not announcements. Not press releases. Whispers.

About a new kind of credit union initiative taking shape.

About a model designed from the ground up for the post-algorithmic age.

About an institution that blends digital sophistication with radical local presence.

The conversations point toward southwest Florida. Toward Fort Myers and its surrounding communities. Toward a launch window sometime in 2026.

No details yet. Just hints.

A cooperative designed not around products, but around life stages.

A digital platform that defaults to human connection rather than abstraction.

A governance model that gives members real voice — not symbolic votes.

A mission built around resilience: financial, environmental, communal.

If it happens — and nothing is certain — it will not look like a traditional bank. It won't even look like a traditional credit union.

It will look like the next logical step in a 150-year experiment called cooperative finance.

Technology as a Tool, Not a Master

The irony of the future credit union is that it will likely be more technologically sophisticated than many banks — and less technologically dominant.

Artificial intelligence will play a role. So will machine learning, real-time fraud detection, predictive cash-flow tools, and digital identity systems.

But the philosophy will be different.

Instead of using algorithms to replace humans, credit unions are increasingly using algorithms to support better human decisions.

A risk model might flag a concern — but a person still makes the call.

A budgeting app might suggest a savings plan — but a counselor helps interpret it.

A chatbot might answer routine questions — but escalates quickly to a real voice.

This hybrid model — part digital, part deeply personal — may turn out to be the antidote to the fully automated systems that dominate much of modern finance.

Why the Next 50 Years Belong to Cooperatives

The future will not be kind to institutions that confuse efficiency with wisdom.

As automation accelerates, the risks multiply:

- Algorithmic bias
- Financial exclusion
- Data exploitation
- Systemic fragility
- Loss of accountability

Credit unions, by their very structure, resist these failures.

They are slower — and therefore safer.

They are smaller — and therefore adaptable.

They are democratic — and therefore accountable.

In a world that has optimized everything except human wellbeing, these traits are not weaknesses. They are advantages.

From Margins to Mainstream — Again

Credit unions have been underestimated before. They were dismissed as "penny banks" in the 1930s.

They were mocked as quaint in the 1950s.

They were written off as obsolete in the 1990s.

Each time, they endured.

Not by becoming something else — but by becoming more themselves.

The next 50 years may follow the same pattern.

As finance grows more abstract, credit unions will grow more concrete.

As systems grow more complex, credit unions will emphasize clarity.

As trust erodes elsewhere, credit unions will quietly accumulate it.

And in places like Fort Myers — places shaped by change, challenge, and community — new cooperative experiments may remind America of an old truth:

The future of finance doesn't belong to algorithms alone. It belongs to people who choose to build together.

The Return of Place in a Placeless Economy

For years, the assumption was that physical location no longer mattered. Everything would be online. Branches would disappear. Geography would be irrelevant.

And yet, something curious is happening.

People are rediscovering place.

Local food.

Local energy.

Local journalism.

Local governance.

And, slowly, local finance.

Credit unions, long rooted in specific communities, are uniquely positioned to lead this shift — not by retreating from digital access, but by re-anchoring it in real places with real needs.

Nowhere is this more visible than in regions experiencing rapid change.

Florida as a Financial Frontier

Florida has always been a testing ground for American futures.

Booms and busts.

Migration and reinvention.

Sunbelt growth and climate risk.

Wealth and precarity side by side.

Southwest Florida, in particular, sits at a crossroads:

retirees and young families, service workers and entrepreneurs, long-time residents and new arrivals rebuilding after storms — literal and financial.

In such places, traditional banking models often fail.

They are too rigid, too centralized, too slow to adapt to local realities.

Credit unions, by contrast, thrive on specificity.

They ask: Who is here? What do they need? What does resilience look like in this community?

And occasionally — very occasionally — those questions give rise to something new.

The Long Arc of a Simple Idea

In the end, the story of credit unions has always been the same story, told in different eras.

Farmers pooling savings in rural Germany.

Mill workers organizing in New England.

Immigrant families protecting each other from loan sharks.

Communities surviving depressions, deregulation, and digital upheaval.

Now, a new chapter waits to be written.

Not in a boardroom.

Not in Silicon Valley.

But in real communities — perhaps under palm trees, perhaps around folding tables — where people still believe that finance can be humane.

If the next great innovation in American finance emerges not from code alone, but from cooperation, it will not be an accident.

It will be the continuation of a very old idea.

People helping people — even in an algorithmic age.

The Difference Between the German and American Real Estate Work Environment

After nearly eight years of experience in the German real estate market, I have now been active in the Florida real estate industry for several weeks. During this short time, I have already been in contact with brokers, investors, and clients, and I have attended several industry events. These first impressions have revealed clear differences between the real estate work environments in Germany and the United States.

One of the most striking observations is the openness of Americans. People approach you far more frequently and are genuinely willing to engage in new conversations. The overall concept here appears to be strongly oriented toward collaboration rather than competition. Instead of a mindset of "everyone against everyone," there is a noticeable emphasis on working together.

Many professionals show a sincere interest in helping others and sharing their knowledge. There is a strong sense that cooperation is not just a short-term strategy, but a long-term investment in future success. This forward-looking understanding of collaboration seems deeply embedded in the industry culture.

Overall, I greatly appreciate this openness and welcoming attitude. I am looking forward to learning more about the real estate market in Florida and, just as importantly, about the people who shape this business every day.

Market Update Lee County Single-Family Housing Snapshot*

Metric	Value	Year-over-Year Change
Median Sales Price	\$389,900	-2.5%
Active Listings	7,646	+0.8%
Median Days on Market	56 days	+12.0%
Months of Supply	6.5 months	-5.8%
List Price / Sale Price Ratio	97.0%	-0.5%
Avg. 30-Year Fixed Mortgage Rate	6.19%	-0.89%

*Data reflects closed single-family home activity in Lee County for December 2025. All MLS metrics are reported as rolling 3-month averages to better capture underlying trends. Mortgage rate data sourced from Mortgage News Daily.

What the Data Is Saying

As of December 2025, Lee County's single-family market continues to operate in balanced-to-buyer-favored territory, with months of supply holding at 6.5 even as inventory edges slightly higher year-over-year. Homes are taking longer to sell, with days on market up 12%, signaling softer demand and more deliberate buyer behavior. Median sale prices are down modestly year-over-year, indicating gradual price normalization rather than the sharp correction we saw in 2024. The list-to-sale price ratio at 97.0% confirms increased negotiation, with concessions playing a larger role in getting deals across the finish line. While supply remains elevated, the year-over-year decline in months of supply suggests absorption has improved compared to last year. Mortgage rates hovering just above 6% continue to cap affordability and limit urgency, reinforcing a market that rewards realistic pricing and strong preparation over speed. Overall, conditions favor informed buyers and disciplined sellers who align pricing with current demand.

By Kevin Tremmel

Spotlight Home

INSERT PICTURE
793 Sunset Vista Dr, Fort Myers
3 Bed | 2 Bath | 2 Car Garage
Prime Location! No Flood Zone!



Sip & Sizzle – A Downtown Story



Downtown Fort Myers has a rhythm that cannot be manufactured. It does not try to impress. It reveals itself slowly, almost quietly. In the late afternoon, when the sun softens and the streets begin to cool, the River District shifts its energy. Offices empty out, galleries glow from within, and people slow their pace. Conversations begin on sidewalks, laughter carries between buildings, and downtown turns from a destination into a shared experience.

Sip & Sizzle lives exactly in this transition. It is not loud, not flashy, and not designed to pull attention away from its surroundings. Instead, it absorbs the atmosphere of downtown and reflects it back in its own way. According to co-owner Nils Richter, this connection is no coincidence.

"For me, it's actually hard to talk about Sip & Sizzle without talking about downtown," Richter says.

"Every restaurant needs its own personality, but the bigger story is always the environment it lives in."

Richter describes downtown Fort Myers with a sense of emotional familiarity rather than business language. After moving to Southwest Florida, the district reminded him of something deeply personal. "It felt like a real grown town," he explains. "Not synthetic, not like strip malls or outlet centers. It reminded me of my upbringing in Germany. A place where people live, work, and spend time together."

This live work play dynamic became the foundation of Sip & Sizzle. The restaurant was never meant to be an isolated concept. It was designed as a piece of the larger downtown ecosystem. "Every business has to play its part," Richter says. "If multiple places add something meaningful, they all work better together."

None of them would be as strong on their own."

That philosophy is felt the moment you walk inside. During brunch and lunch hours, Sip & Sizzle feels open and light. Natural light fills the space. The atmosphere is calm, relaxed, and inviting. It is a place where meetings turn into long conversations, where lunch is not rushed, and where people linger over coffee a little longer than planned.

"During the daytime, we wanted it to feel dry and airy," Richter explains. "A place you actually want to come back to for breakfast or lunch."

The lunch menu reflects this intention. Fresh salads, thoughtfully composed plates, and options that feel satisfying without being heavy dominate the midday experience. Dishes like the Mediterranean salad or beet and goat cheese combinations have quietly become staples. "We sell so many of those," Richter says with a smile. "People come back for them again and again."

As evening approaches, the mood begins to shift. Lighting softens. Shadows deepen. The energy becomes more intimate. Sip & Sizzle transforms into a retreat within downtown. "At night, it becomes moody," Richter says. "It's a great date night place. A place for celebration. Somewhere you can sit down, breathe, and enjoy the moment."

Much of this transformation happens subconsciously. "We spend a lot of effort on lighting," Richter explains. "So wherever you sit, you're kind of in your own little cocoon of light." The goal is not formality or stiffness, but comfort. "Upscale, but relaxed. Friendly service, but not formal. Elevated food, but not fine dining."

The heart of the dinner experience is the signature hot stone concept. Richter had carried the idea with him for nearly a decade before opening Sip & Sizzle. "For about ten years, this idea lived in the back of my mind," he says. "When we finally started working on it seriously, we wanted to do it in an elevated way."

The arrival of the hot stone at the table is theatrical without being forced. The sound, the heat, and the visual moment naturally slow the pace of the meal.

"We're not the only ones doing it," Richter says, "but I truly don't think there's another restaurant in the States doing it better."

What surprised the team most was how clearly guests responded. "About eighty percent of people who come here for dinner come specifically for the stones," Richter explains. "That changed how we run the entire operation." The kitchen, the service flow, and even the pacing of the evening adapted to this demand.

The second pillar of Sip & Sizzle is the bar. Cocktails are treated with the same level of intention as the food. "We wanted a classic cocktail foundation," Richter says. "Not experimental for the sake of being different. You should always know where the drink is headed."

Quality is uncompromising. "There is no well liquor here," he adds. "No bottom shelf. Everything we serve is something we stand behind." Guests notice this consistency, and many come specifically for the cocktail program.

Sip & Sizzle does not see itself in competition with surrounding restaurants. "If you give people more reasons to come downtown, more people will show up," Richter says. "That helps everyone." Events, theater nights, street closures, and seasonal visitors all contribute to a shared rhythm that benefits the entire district.

Richter's relationship with downtown Fort Myers spans decades. Before hospitality, he worked as a general contractor and helped restore numerous buildings in the area. "I saw downtown when it was struggling," he says. "And I saw it come back." That long term view creates a sense of responsibility. "I've always felt responsible for helping make this a better place to live."

Challenges remain, especially when it comes to infrastructure and parking, but Richter remains committed. "You stick with it," he says simply. "You figure it out."

Today, Sip & Sizzle stands as more than a restaurant. It is a daytime refuge, an evening destination, and a reflection of what happens when people believe in a place long enough to invest in it. In downtown Fort Myers, it has become a steady constant in a city that continues to evolve.

By Katharina Kaufmann



Valentine's Day in America – When Love Is Meant to Be Shared and Seen



Valentine's Day in the United States is like a marching band announcing that love has officially arrived—and it has brought glitter, ribbons, and confetti.

It is not a quiet affair. This holiday sparkles, declares itself boldly, and invites everyone to participate. For Europeans, such openness can feel overwhelming—yet it offers a fascinating glimpse into how Americans understand and celebrate love.

Long before February 14th, love becomes visible everywhere. Daily life glows in shades of red and pink. Hearts appear in shop windows, on greeting cards, in classrooms—even at the dental office. Love is written, wrapped, and displayed—joyful, expressive, and meant to be seen and seen.

From Ancient Roots to Modern Romance

The holiday traces back to ancient Rome and the legend of Saint Valentine, who is said to have secretly married couples when marriage was forbidden. Over centuries, it evolved into a celebration of romantic devotion in Europe.

Germans Observe, Americans Declare

What distinguishes American Valentine's Day is its emotional volume. Love is spoken aloud, written down, and repeated often. Americans seem to believe that feelings grow stronger when expressed, displayed, or tied to a balloon.

This difference appears in language as well. In English, "I love you" is said generously—to children, parents, friends, pets, even playfully to strangers. In German, "Ich liebe dich" carries much more weight and is used sparingly. More often, one hears "Ich mag dich"—modest and careful by comparison.

Yet there is warmth in the American ease with these words. Frequent repetition doesn't dilute them—it strengthens closeness. Love is celebrated.

Love in a Southwest Florida Light

Southwest Florida adds its own magic. Valentine's dinners unfold outdoors under warm skies. Couples stroll along the beach at sunset, barefoot in sand, while palm trees sway above candlelit tables and the ocean sparkles behind them.

It is romance shaped by light, warmth, and space. The salty breeze, glowing horizon, and gentle waves turn Valentine's Day into an experience rather than a single moment—a reminder to pause, notice, and savor being together.

A Celebration for Everyone

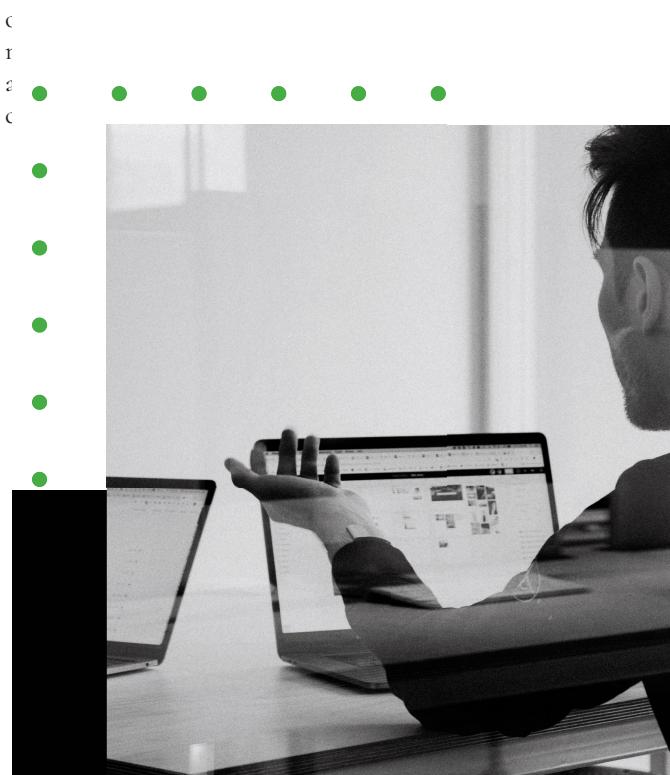
Valentine's Day in America is inclusive. Children exchange cards with classmates, friends and colleagues share small gestures, and neighbors acknowledge one another. Love is expansive, not restrained.

Glitter With a Heart

Valentine's Day is brighter, louder, and filled with glitter—but beneath the showiness lies sincerity. And perhaps that is the true American twist on an ancient tradition: love, once whispered in secret, is now celebrated out loud, meant to be shared and seen.

The message is simple, and deeply personal: everyone deserves to feel seen, to know they matter. Sometimes, that recognition is the truest gift of all..

By S. Mechalik



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Why We Need to Celebrate – Thoughts on Carnival

Hardly any other time of year is so passionately loved – and at the same time so decisively rejected. For some, Carnival is pure *joie de vivre*, for others mere noise, excess, and dressing up. And yet it is worth taking a closer look – beyond the confetti, costumes, and hangovers. Because Carnival tells us more than just about days of revelry. It tells us something about people, about community, about order and freedom – and, not least, about the Christian faith.

Let's start with the calendar. Carnival does not stand somewhere in the middle, but at a threshold. It lies between winter and spring, between everyday life and Lent. It is embedded in a larger narrative of life that knows that humans need times of abundance – and times of reflection. Without one, the other becomes empty. Those who never celebrate forget how to do without. And those who never do without lose their sense of proportion.

The name itself reveals this tension: *carne vale* – “farewell to meat.” Carnival is not a farewell to life, but a conscious pause before a time of concentration. Before turning inward, life is allowed to burst outward once more: with music, laughter, dance, and community.

But Carnival is more than just a holiday on the calendar. It is a game with order. For a short time, the world is turned upside down. Fools speak the truth, authorities are mocked, hierarchies lose their self-evident nature. What otherwise seems fixed begins to falter.

This “upside-down world” is not destruction, but a mirror. It shows that no order is absolute. That power remains relative. That roles must not be confused with the person themselves. There is a surprising depth to this laughter. Because those who can laugh at themselves take themselves seriously – but not too seriously.

It is precisely here that Carnival touches on a fundamental movement of Christianity. For the biblical tradition also knows these reversals: the last shall be first. The weak shall become strong. The powerful shall be dethroned. Carnival translates these ideas not into doctrine, but into experience. Not through arguments, but through humor.

And then there are the masks. They belong to Carnival like the sound of drums. At first glance, they hide the face. But perhaps they reveal more than they conceal. Because in everyday life, people wear many invisible masks: their role at work, society's expectations, the image they maintain of themselves.

Carnival allows these roles to be made visible – and at the same time relativized. People who dress up often feel a new sense of freedom. Not because they become someone else, but because they are not defined for a moment. Behind this lies a quiet truth: people are more than what they do or represent. Their value lies deeper.

This dynamic is also evident internationally. In Europe, carnival is highly ritualized and clearly limited in time. It is precisely this limitation that prevents it from becoming arbitrary. The extraordinary remains extraordinary.

In the USA, for example at Mardi Gras in New Orleans, carnival is linked to history and identity. Parades and music tell of cultural roots, of exclusion and self-assertion, of the desire to be seen. Here, carnival becomes the voice of the community.

In Latin America, on the other hand, it is often more physical, more rhythmic, more intense. Dance and movement become an expression of the will to live – especially where life is hard. Joy becomes a form of resistance against hopelessness.

This, too, is a profound truth: celebration can carry us where words no longer suffice.

But Carnival has its limits. When moderation is lost, the festival loses its soul. In the Christian understanding, freedom is never reckless. It is always linked to responsibility. That is precisely why Carnival is followed by Lent. Not as a punishment, but as a complement. After movement comes stillness. After laughter comes reflection. The two belong together.

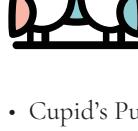
Perhaps Carnival is more important today than it seems at first glance. In a time marked by pressure to perform, uncertainty, and division, it opens up a space where people can meet—beyond status, opinion, and origin. For a moment, what someone achieves doesn't matter, but rather that they are there.

Seen in this light, Carnival is more than just a few days of revelry. It is a cultural memory. It reminds us that humans are not only made to function, but also to celebrate. That joy is not the opposite of seriousness, but its prerequisite.

Perhaps this is precisely where its lasting significance lies: Carnival tells us – amid laughter – of a hope that reaches deeper than everyday life. And that life becomes complete when it has room for moderation and joy.

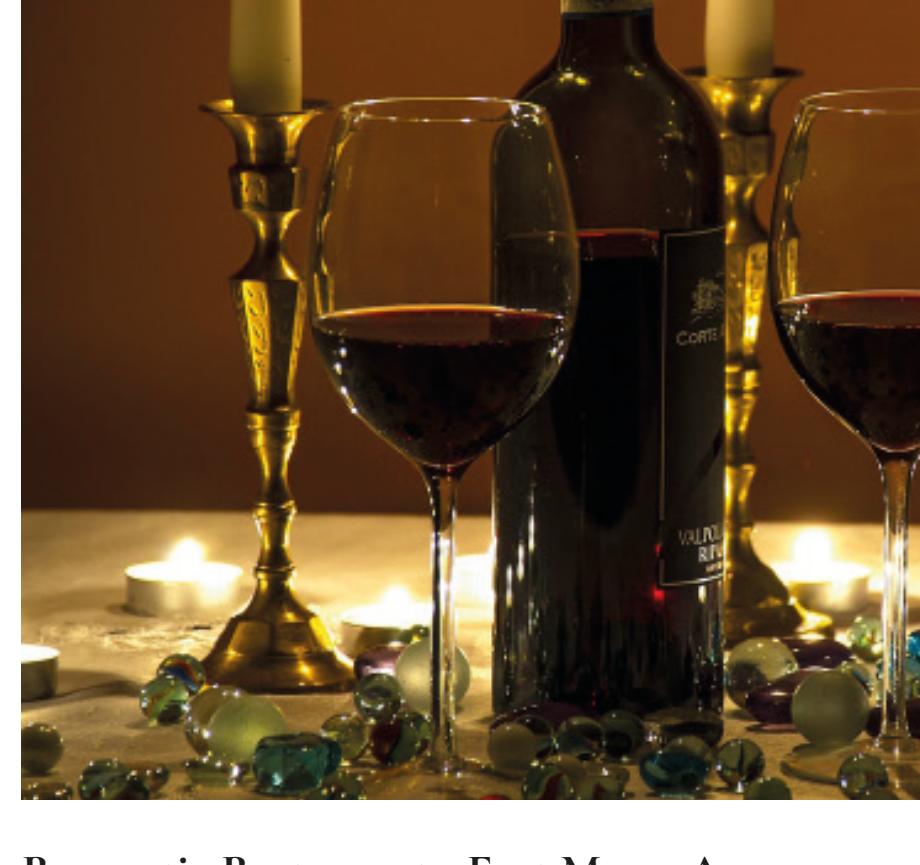
By Tobias Leinesser

Valentine's Day Tips & Romantic Events (Cape Coral / Fort Myers)



Valentine's Day Weekend Events

- Cupid's Pub Crawl (Cape Coral) — A themed drink/appetizer tour through multiple local hotspots with Valentine's Day vibes (night of Feb 15).
- Valentine's Day Sunset Dolphin Cruise (Fort Myers Beach) — A romantic sunset cruise with music, views of dolphins and Gulf Coast scenery, perfect for couples.
- Candlelight: Valentine's Day Special (Fort Myers) — A live candlelit concert experience at Florida Repertory Theatre — great date night music under the glow of candlelight.



Other Romantic Ideas

- Beach Picnic at Fort Myers Beach or Sanibel — Pack a basket and enjoy sunset views together.
- Nature Walk at Lovers Key State Park — Quiet beach or trail strolls with wildlife and scenic views.
- Couples Spa Day — Indulge together with massages or spa treatments at local wellness centers (Margarita Ville Resort Fort Myers Beach or Sunseeker Resort in Punta Gorda)

Romantic Restaurants: Cape Coral Area

Here are some great options that locals and visitors alike recommend for Valentine's dinners or date nights:



Cape Coral Favorites

- High Tide Social House — Casual but charming; great for cocktails and sunset dinners.
- Fish Tale Grill by Merrick Seafood — Fresh seafood with a slightly upscale feel, ideal for a special night.
- Prime 239 Steakhouse — Classic steakhouse with elegant ambience for a date night.
- Point 57 — Brunch or dinner with good cocktails (often highlighted in local reviews).

Romantic Restaurants: Fort Myers Area

If you're heading across the Caloosahatchee or want something a bit more classic datenight style:

- Melting Pot — Highly rated fondue spot with Valentine's special menus and intimate shared courses.
- BLANC — Sophisticated choice for a special evening.
- Terra Nostra Ristorante — Italian classic with romantic charm.
- Bruno's of Brooklyn, Italian Eatery — A beloved local favorite with warm, cozy vibes.
- The Veranda — Classic upscale restaurant known for fine service and a romantic setting.



Tips for Valentine's

- Reserve early — Special menus (like at The Melting Pot or local Italian spots) often require reservations well before Feb 14.

NFL Season 2025/26:

A League in Transition, Global Excitement and the Hype Surrounding the Super Bowl



The 2025/26 NFL season has once again taken the world of football to a new level. Surprises, drama and global attention have defined a campaign that is set to be remembered for years to come. While the focus in the United States traditionally lies on the playoffs and the ultimate climax of the season—the Super Bowl—the league continues to gain enormous momentum internationally, particularly in Germany.

At the sporting center of the season were two historic franchises whose unexpected failures caused widespread attention: the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles. After years of dominance, the Chiefs disappointed by missing the playoffs for the first time in over a decade, finishing with a 6–11 record. Injury concerns, most notably the torn ACL suffered by quarterback Patrick Mahomes, combined with an inconsistent defense, contributed to this historic low point. A franchise that had ruled the AFC for years now faces a period of transition that could fundamentally shape its future.

The Philadelphia Eagles, Super Bowl champions of the previous season, experienced a similarly frustrating campaign. Their title defense ended earlier than expected with a Wild Card loss to the San Francisco 49ers. The early playoff exit was accompanied by internal tensions, exposing the fragile balance within the team and raising questions about long-term stability.

While the playoffs created waves across the league, attention has already shifted to the upcoming Super Bowl LX—the 60th Super Bowl, scheduled for February 8, 2026, at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. This event is far more than a football game. It is a global pop-culture phenomenon that captivates audiences worldwide. The Super Bowl consistently ranks among the most-watched television events of the year, not only in the United States but across the globe.

The combination of elite athletic competition, spectacular halftime performances and high-profile advertising turns the day into a cultural landmark. For many fans, the commercials—often featuring iconic brands such as Budweiser—are as much a part of the tradition as the game itself.

A central element of the Super Bowl's appeal is the halftime show, which has long transcended the boundaries of sport. For Super Bowl LX, international superstar Bad Bunny has been announced as the headliner of the Apple Music Halftime Show. He will become the first solo Spanish-language artist to hold this role, adding significant cultural meaning to the event. Additional performances by Green Day, honoring the 60-year history of the Super Bowl, as well as national anthem renditions by Charlie Puth and other artists—including sign-language performances—will further expand the show's reach.

The fascination of the Super Bowl lies in this unique blend of world-class sport, entertainment and brand presence. Millions of people worldwide celebrate not just football, but a full-scale media event. In the United States, Super Bowl parties are a staple of popular culture, and interest continues to rise steadily in Germany. Fans gather in bars, private homes or organized events to enjoy the game, the halftime show, the commercials and the overall spectacle. Fantasy football leagues and social media campaigns further amplify the excitement.

From an international perspective, Germany plays a particularly important role. The NFL counts more than 19 million fans in the country, with approximately 3.6 million actively following the sport.



This growing popularity is reflected not only in strong television ratings but also in the increasing demand for live NFL games on German soil. Several regular-season games are planned to return to Munich in the coming years, underlining Germany's strategic importance to the league. Flag football tournaments, local teams and a vibrant fan community further demonstrate the sport's deepening roots.

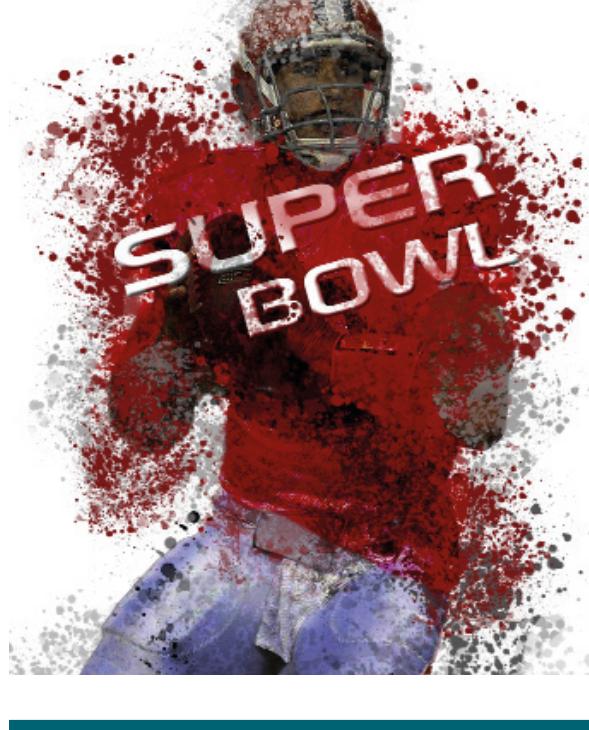
Beyond the international context, new narratives are also emerging within the league itself. Teams such as the Detroit Lions, Cincinnati Bengals, Carolina Panthers and Houston Texans have capitalized on the unexpected downfall of traditional contenders, reshaping the competitive landscape.

As a result, Super Bowl LX could become one of the most exciting championship games in recent years, featuring a wide range of potential participants and generating enormous media attention.

Ultimately, the Super Bowl is far more than the conclusion of a season. It is a global spectacle, a platform for cultural expression and an economic powerhouse with a worldwide audience of billions. For fans around the globe, it represents everything football has to offer—tension, drama, commerce and entertainment combined. And as the 2025/26 NFL season approaches its finale, one thing is clear: the league continues to grow not only as a sport, but as a global brand that connects and captivates people around the world.

By John Heinrich

SUPER BOWL: FACTS, FIGURES & FUN TRIVIA



1. Ticket Prices:

A Super Bowl ticket is the definition of luxury. Average resale prices usually range between \$6,000 and \$9,000, while premium seats and luxury boxes can exceed \$50,000.

2. Chicken Wing Explosion:

Approximately 1.4 billion chicken wings are consumed in the U.S. on Super Bowl Sunday alone.

3. Halftime Bathroom Rush:

During halftime, water usage in some U.S. cities increases by up to 40 percent—a measurable annual phenomenon.

4. Most Successful Player:

Tom Brady remains the undisputed Super Bowl king with seven championships and five Super Bowl MVP awards—more titles than any single NFL franchise.

5. Advertising Gold:

A 30-second Super Bowl commercial now costs around \$7 million. It is the only TV event where viewers actively look forward to watching advertisements.

6. More Food Than Thanksgiving:

A 30-second Super Bowl commercial now costs around \$7 million. It is the only TV event where viewers actively look forward to watching advertisements.

7. Productivity Drop:

The Monday after the Super Bowl is considered one of the least productive workdays of the year, often referred to as "Super Bowl Sick Day."

8. Jersey Superstition:

Teams wearing white jerseys have historically won more Super Bowls than teams in darker colors—a popular superstition among fans.

9. Germany's Sleepless Night:

Teams wearing white jerseys have historically won more Super Bowls than teams in darker colors—a popular superstition among fans.

10. The Most Expensive Beer:

Beer prices inside Super Bowl stadiums typically range from \$15 to \$18, making it one of the most expensive beers fans will ever toast a touchdown with.

Hidden Sparks – Pets Looking to Shine

Every month, we take a moment to slow down and look a little closer — once again shining a light on two special animals from the Cape Coral Animal Shelter. Some arrive quietly, others with playful curiosity, but each one carries a story shaped by patience, resilience, and hope.

They may take their time to trust, to open up, or to step forward — and that's perfectly okay. Because the most meaningful connections often grow slowly, built on kindness, understanding, and shared moments. With a little time and a lot of heart, these hidden sparks can turn into lifelong companions.

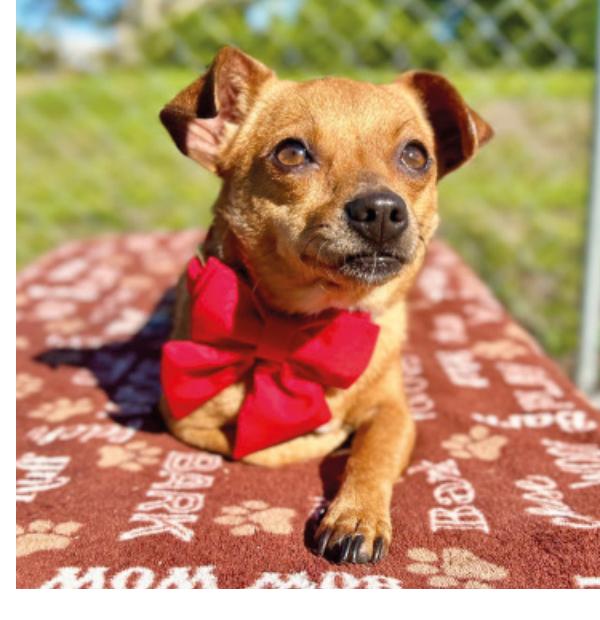
Maybe one of these furry souls is waiting just for you.

Cape Coral Animal Shelter
325 SW 2nd Avenue
Cape Coral, FL 33991

More information and all adoptable animals at:
www.capecoralanimalshelter.com

Hours of Operation:

- Tuesday & Thursday: 12:00–5:00 pm
- Friday through Sunday: 12:00–4:00 pm
- Monday & Wednesday: Closed

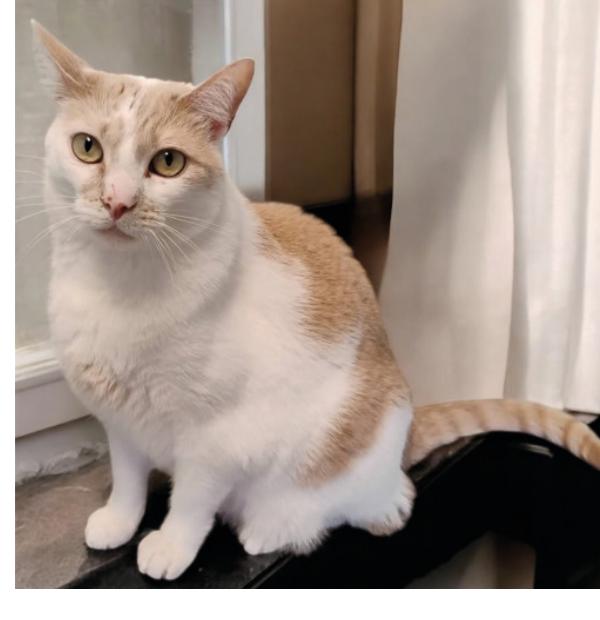


Cenicienta

whose heart is full of warmth once trust is built. When she feels safe, she becomes all cariño and gentle kisses, showing her affection in soft, loving ways. She prefers to take things slowly, easing her way into new connections with care and curiosity.

Cenicienta may need a little extra time to come out of her shell, but those quiet beginnings often lead to the strongest bonds. Once she chooses you, she's a loyal compañera who will happily stay close, sharing cozy moments and calm companionship. She's not looking for perfection — just patience, kindness, and a lap she can call her own.

If you're ready to open your heart to a gentle soul who will stay by your side through it all, Cenicienta may be waiting just for you. She has been with us for over 65 days, and her adoption fee is \$225.



Peaches (Puck)

Peaches (Puck) is a 5–7-year-old male — a gentle soul who may seem a little shy when you first meet him. Give him a bit of time, though, and you'll quickly discover what a friendly, easygoing companion he truly is. Once he feels comfortable, Peaches loves to relax on the lanai, soaking up the fresh air while quietly watching the world go by — one of his favorite ways to unwind.

When he's in the mood to play, his playful side comes out in the sweetest way. Wand toys are his absolute favorite, especially the ones with feathers or those wiggly "worm" attachments — they're simply irresistible to him. Peaches enjoys a calm routine, gentle interaction, and the company of someone who understands that trust grows best at its own pace.

If you're looking for a sweet, laid-back companion who will reward patience with affection and quiet companionship, Peaches (Puck) might be your perfect match. He has been at CCAS for over 100 days, and his adoption fee is \$70.

Crossroads Hope Academy: Where Stability Becomes Hope

On any given evening at Crossroads Hope Academy, the sounds tell a powerful story — laughter from the game room, a basketball echoing across the cracked court, sauce simmering on the stove, or a cake baking for a birthday a boy may be celebrating for the very first time.

Crossroads Hope Academy is a nonprofit residential foster care home for at-risk teenage boys with two campuses in Southwest Florida. Since opening in 2013, Crossroads has provided stability and care for more than 600 boys from across Florida who have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, and an average of 15 failed placements before arriving.

For many, Crossroads is the first safe and consistent home they have ever known.

Showing Up When It Matters Most

Every day, direct care staff at Crossroads welcome boys who arrive guarded and uncertain, often carrying all their belongings in a garbage bag. These youth have learned not to trust — not because they are "difficult," but because so many adults in their lives have left.

At Crossroads, staff show up with consistency, structure, empathy, and compassion. Even during outbursts, withdrawal, or defiance, they remain present, creating a safe environment where trust can slowly begin to grow. The focus is not on punishment, but on building healthy relationships and helping the boys feel valued and worthy of care.

Stability is the foundation. From stability, hope emerges.



Healing Happens in Small Moments

Crossroads serves boys ages 12 to 17 who have been difficult to place due to behavioral challenges, legal involvement, academic struggles, and extensive therapeutic needs. During the 2024–25 fiscal year, Crossroads served 86 boys, 12 of whom aged out of care while living here.

Through tutoring, sports programs, life-skills coaching, healthcare advocacy, career readiness, and everyday family moments — like shared meals, holidays, and birthdays — staff help fill gaps left by an overwhelmed foster care system.

Healing often begins in the smallest moments: cooking dinner together, being encouraged to attend school, joining a team, or hearing for the first time, "You're safe here." Over time, boys begin to believe in themselves because someone else believes in them first.

Rewriting the Story

As trust grows, boys begin inviting staff and mentors to school events; asking for help with homework, job applications, and driving lessons; or celebrating milestones like graduation. Someone is always there cheering.

Crossroads uses a collaborative problem-solving approach that emphasizes connection over correction, helping young men develop the skills, confidence, and relationships needed to transition into adulthood. The goal is lasting change — not just for today, but for a lifetime.

How the Community Can Help

Crossroads Hope Academy cannot do this work alone.

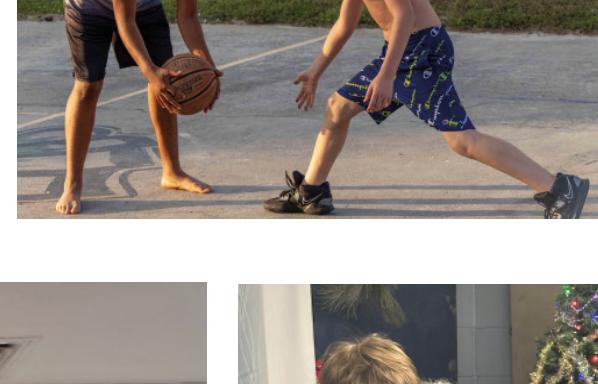
Volunteers are needed to mentor, tutor, coach, and share meals. Community partners can donate food and clothing, sponsor activities, host fundraising events, and help spread awareness. Donors make it possible to sustain a model of care built on consistency, dignity, and love.

These boys may not face visible monsters, but they battle invisible ones every day — abuse, neglect, abandonment, and the belief that everyone eventually leaves. At Crossroads, those monsters are confronted with patience, structure, laughter, and adults who refuse to give up.

That is why Crossroads Hope Academy exists.

To learn more or get involved, visit Crossroadspg.org, sponsor a meal, shop our Amazon wish lists, or sponsor our programs through a donation or planned giving — because the best investment is in the next generation.

By Liz Green, Crossroads Hope Academy



Recipe of The Month:

Original German Döner at home

Döner is great because it combines perfectly seasoned, slow-roasted meat with fresh vegetables and flavorful sauces, creating a balanced and satisfying dish. The contrast between crispy meat, soft bread, and fresh toppings makes every bite interesting. That's exactly why Germans love it - simple, filling, and consistently good.

The classic German Döner lives by three simple rules: juicy meat, fresh ingredients, and proper bread.

This recipe shows how to recreate the authentic street-stand experience at home - without a rotating spit, but with real flavor, structure, and soul.

The focus is intentionally on chicken, which has proven to be the most reliable, tender, and every day - friendly option for pan preparation.



THE MEAT

Why Chicken Is the Best Choice at Home

For homemade Döner, chicken is ideal:

- stays juicy
- doesn't turn tough
- forgives timing and heat variations
- performs perfectly in a pan

Recommended cuts:

- Boneless, skinless chicken thighs (best option)
- Very thinly sliced chicken breast (alternative)

Other meat options:

- Veal: excellent but difficult to source
- Beef: possible (e.g. Philly-style cuts), but sensitive
- Ground meat: common, but not traditional

Bottom line:

For consistent, authentic results at home, chicken is the best choice.

DÖNER MARINADE

for approx. 2.2 lbs / 1 kg meat)

• 5 tbsp neutral oil (canola or sunflower)

• 4 tbsp plain yogurt

• 3 garlic cloves, pressed

• 2½ tsp sweet paprika

• 1½ tsp hot paprika or chili

• 1½ tsp ground cumin

• 1½ tsp oregano

• 1½ tsp salt

• ¼ tsp black pepper

Mix everything well and coat the meat thoroughly.

Marinate at least 1 hour, ideally 4–8 hours, up to 24 hours refrigerated.

COOKING THE MEAT (PAN METHOD)

- Heat a large pan over medium-high heat
- No additional oil needed
- Cook meat in small batches
- Let it sear before turning
- 2–3 minutes per batch

Street-Stand Finish:

Return all meat to the pan, add a small knob of butter, toss for 30 seconds.

Result: juicy, aromatic, and unmistakably authentic.

HOMEMADE FLATBREAD (Makes 4 Döner pockets)

Ingredients:

- 4 cups (500 g) all-purpose flour
- 1 packet dry yeast (7 g)
- 1 tsp sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- approx. 1¼ cups (300 ml) warm water
- optional: sesame or nigella seeds

Method:

1. Mix flour, yeast, sugar, and salt
2. Add water and oil
3. Knead 8–10 minutes until smooth
4. Cover and let rise 60–90 minutes
5. Divide into 4 equal balls
6. Shape and rest 10–15 minutes
7. Press into 8–9 inch (20–22 cm) flatbreads
8. Brush lightly with water, sprinkle seeds if desired
9. Bake at 475°F / 245°C on a preheated tray for 6–8 minutes

Wrap in a clean towel after baking to keep soft.

CLASSIC DONER FILLINGS

- Iceberg lettuce, finely shredded
- White or red cabbage, very thinly sliced
- Red onions, fine strips
- Tomatoes, cut into wedges

Season tomatoes only when assembling to avoid soggy bread.

SAUCES

Garlic Sauce:

- 1¼ cups (300 g) yogurt
- 3 garlic cloves
- Salt and pepper
- Splash of lemon juice
- optional: 2 tbsp mayonnaise

Spicy Sauce:

- 3 tbsp yogurt
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- Chili or hot paprika
- Salt
- Splash of lemon juice

BUILDING THE DÖNER

(The Traditional Street-Stand Order)

- 1) Garlic sauce on the bread
- 2) First layer of meat
- 3) Small spoon of sauce
- 4) Second layer of meat
- 5) Lettuce
- 6) Cabbage
- 7) Onions
- 8) Meat on top
- 9) Generous garlic sauce
- 10) Tomatoes and a pinch of salt

The first bite belongs to the meat. ENJOY!

Four AI Prompts for February 2026

Valentine's Day Date Planner

Valentinstag-Planer

"We're celebrating our first Valentine's Day in Southwest Florida. Plan a romantic day for two that includes unique local experiences, waterfront dining, and activities that take advantage of February's perfect weather."

AI suggests:

1. Start with sunrise kayaking at Lovers Key State Park – the name alone sets the mood
2. Book a couples' massage at a Sanibel Island spa followed by shell collecting on Bowman's Beach
3. Reserve sunset dinner at The Mad Hatter on Sanibel or Tarpon Lodge on Pine Island
4. End the evening with stargazing at the Calusa Nature Center planetarium show
5. Pro tip: February temperatures average 75°F – perfect for outdoor dining without summer humidity

Super Bowl Party Planner

Super-Bowl-Party-Planer

"I'm hosting my first Super Bowl party in Cape Coral. Help me plan an authentic American game day experience with food, setup, and timing for guests who are new to football."

AI suggests:

1. Kickoff is typically around 6:30 PM EST – have guests arrive by 5 PM for pregame coverage and socializing
2. Classic game day food: buffalo wings, loaded nachos, sliders, and a big pot of chili – Publix deli has ready-made options
3. Set up multiple viewing areas if space allows – the halftime show draws even non-football fans
4. Create simple betting squares or prop bet sheets for guests unfamiliar with the game
5. Stock up on domestic beers and have both team colors represented in your decorations

Edison Festival of Light Guide

Edison Festival of Light Reiseführer

"We're new to Fort Myers and heard about the Edison Festival of Light. What should we know to make the most of this February event, and what are the highlights?"

AI suggests:

1. The Grand Parade runs through downtown Fort Myers on the third Saturday of February – arrive early for curbside spots on Main Street
2. Festival events span two weeks including craft shows, 5K runs, and the inventor's fair
3. Book downtown restaurant reservations weeks ahead – Ford's Garage and The Standard are parade-route favorites
4. Bring folding chairs, and dress in layers – February evenings can cool down to 60°F
5. Don't miss the illuminated floats – the parade honors Thomas Edison's Fort Myers legacy and his love of light

Downsizing to Florida

"We're empty nesters from the Midwest selling our 4-bedroom home and moving permanently to Southwest Florida. How do we approach downsizing and finding the right-sized property for retirement living?"

AI suggests:

1. Start decluttering 6 months before your move – Florida homes typically have less storage and no basements
2. Consider maintenance-free communities like Pelican Preserve or Heritage Palms for lock-and-leave convenience
3. Right-size your furniture before moving – measure Florida room dimensions, as open floor plans can be deceiving
4. Factor in HOA fees when comparing housing costs – they often cover landscaping, pool, and exterior maintenance
5. Rent for a season first if unsure between condo, villa, or single-family – lifestyle preferences become clearer after living here

Sunshine State of Mind

Part 2: Layover in the Waiting Room – Logistics, Planning, and Plan B

February is approaching, and our house in the Lüneburg Heath has transformed into a logistics center. In one corner, nine suitcases are piled up—this is the luggage that will accompany us on the plane. The rest will follow later by container. It is a strange feeling to sort your entire life this way while administrative processes run in the background. Currently, we are still waiting for the final interview appointment at the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt

The Decision for Plan B

Originally, the plan was to start the journey with the finished visa in our passports. However, international administrative processes have their own timelines, and one must remain flexible. Since our lease in Fort Myers begins on February 1st and work for my new venture and the Daria Community is waiting on-site, we decided on a pragmatic solution: we will initially fly to the USA under the ESTA program.

This naturally means a clear separation of activities. I will initiate the first organizational steps on-site, expand the network, and prepare the infrastructure without being operationally active—as compliance with U.S. regulations is our top priority. We will attend the consulate appointment as soon as it is assigned to us. This will likely be combined with a trip back to Germany in the spring or summer, as we will be there anyway for my son Finn's high school graduation. For us, this is not an obstacle, but simply a logistical adjustment to the circumstances.

The House as an Investment and Anchor

An important decision was not to sell our house in Germany. We have invested a lot of work into it, and it continues to serve as a solid base for us. Instead, we spent the last few weeks preparing the house for short-term rental via Airbnb. This was a project in itself: every room had to be rearranged, inventoried, and optimized for guests. A local couple will handle the management and guest support on-site. The first bookings are already in the system, which shows us that the concept is working. This way, the house is preserved and refinances itself while we build something new in Florida..

Preparations for the Children

For Lenn and Lio, the move is primarily a practical matter. The fact that we are initially flying under a special arrangement doesn't matter in their world. They know they are going to Florida and that some of their things will follow later in a container. Especially important for Lenn: his motocross bike is scheduled for shipment. He is looking forward to exploring the tracks in Florida, which offer entirely different opportunities than here in Northern Germany.

Regarding Captain America, there was a small change of plans. I wasn't able to bring back a photo of the «real» Avenger from my last trip, but the action figure I bought instead serves its purpose just as well. The boys are preparing in their own way and are already using their first English terms in everyday life. For them, it is a move to a new environment with new play opportunities—nothing more and nothing less.

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Logistics and Bureaucracy of the Farewell

The list of completed tasks is long: cars are sold, insurance and subscriptions canceled, and the dissolution of my German business structure is on schedule. The fact that a small water leak occurred in the house shortly before departure was annoying and required quick action to organize repairs, but it has since been resolved. Unforeseen issues like this are simply part of a project of this scale.

Before we leave on February 1st, there is one more important date: on January 17th, we are having our farewell party. Friends and family from all over Germany will come together to see each other in person one last time. Final dinners with our parents are also planned. These are the moments when you realize that physical distance will soon be significantly greater, even though staying in touch via digital means is very easy today.

Arrival in Fort Myers: The First Week

When we land in Florida in early February, the priority list is clearly defined. First, we need a large rental car that can accommodate four people and the nine suitcases. After that, we will go straight to our rental house in North Fort Myers. Since we will arrive there without our own furniture at first, we will set up a shared camp for the first few nights. This is an adventure for the children and the simplest solution for us.

In the first week, the focus will be on exploring the surroundings in detail. Although we did a lot of research in advance, we will make the final selection of kindergartens and schools on-site. Janine will be heavily involved here, as she only knows the facilities from my stories and photos. It is important that we make these decisions together as a family once we feel the atmosphere on the ground. We look forward to finally continuing the process from Florida.

By Marc Siewert



We Want to Hear from You!

Your voice matters. At the Sunshine Post, our new Letters To the Editor section is a space for readers to share opinions, spark conversations, and respond to the stories shaping our community.

Whether you want to comment on a recent article, highlight a topic that deserves attention, or simply share your perspective – we welcome your thoughts.

Send your letter (up to 250 words) to editor@sunshine-post.com.

Unbreakable. Connected. Florida.

Stronger than any storm, more powerful than the heat – why Florida's communities stick together like nowhere else.



When Florida shakes, when the wind tests the facades of houses and the sun beats down mercilessly on roofs, streets, and schoolyards for days on end, that's when we show who we really are. Here, where hurricanes have names and heat is not a whim but a reality, something emerges that cannot be measured or bought: a community with backbone, heart, and a quiet, natural strength.

Florida is no place for the indecisive. It is a state that demands – physically, emotionally, socially. And that is precisely where its strength lies. Here, community is not an ideal – it is the law. While elsewhere people are still discussing, here they are taking action. When the storm comes, families do not stand alone at the window, but neighbors stand with neighbors. Generators are shared, doors are opened, children are reassured together, while adults take responsibility. Not out of a sense of duty, but out of conviction. This form of dominance is quiet but clear: we leave no one behind. It is not authoritarian, but protective. Not loud, but effective.

Social cohesion is not created through political programs, but through lived practice. Churches become places of refuge, school gyms become supply centers, backyards become meeting places where food, information, and hope are shared. Families stand in the middle – always.

Resilience with a human face Florida is a hotspot for climate change. Rising sea levels, infrastructural stresses, extreme weather conditions: all of this is scientifically documented. But what statistics don't capture is the emotional intelligence of the communities.

Here, resilience doesn't mean becoming hard – it means remaining soft for one another.

Parents look out for other people's children, young people help seniors, strangers become close friends within hours. This emotional reliability acts as a social protective shield. Families in particular benefit from this. Children grow up knowing that strength and compassion are not opposites. That you tackle problems without looking away. That responsibility is not delegated, but taken on.

Diversity as a powerhouse Florida's communities are characterized by cultural diversity, migration, and intergenerational lifestyles. Many people bring experiences from crisis regions with them – they know what it means to have to rely on each other.

This collective experience shapes a clear attitude: We are different, but we stand together. Multilingualism, family networks, and cultural proximity create trust—especially in extreme situations. Diversity is not managed here, but lived.



The heat—and the warmth of the people

The role of families is particularly striking. In Florida, they are much more than private retreats. They function as social hubs, as informal care and information centers. Grandparents, parents, children—often several generations under one roof or at least in close proximity—share responsibility and experience.

In times of crisis, this structure becomes a supporting pillar. While official aid is getting started, families are already taking action. They organize transportation, supplies, and care.

They provide support – both emotional and practical. And they pass on values: solidarity, a sense of duty, and caring.

Children learn early on that community is not an abstract concept, but something you do. That strength means being present. That you help without expecting applause.

Trust as social currency. In many parts of the world, trust has become a scarce commodity. In Florida, however, it is an everyday currency. Not blind, not naive—but grown through repeated proof.

Anyone who has ever seen neighbors clearing debris together after a storm, who has seen strangers distributing food without asking about origin or opinion, questions, develops a deep, quiet trust in their own community. This trust reduces fear. It stabilizes the psyche. It creates room for maneuver where otherwise paralysis threatens.

The result is a society that is not perfect, but resilient. Not conflict-free, but solution-oriented.

Resilience beyond buzzwords Resilience has become a buzzword. In Florida, however, it is not a theory, but every day life. It is not manifested in perseverance at any cost, but in consciously dealing with vulnerability.

After storms, there is mourning – for losses, for damaged livelihoods, sometimes for people. But this grief finds space. It is shared. And that is precisely where the ability to get back up again lies.

Psychologists speak of collective resilience: the ability of a community to process stress together. Florida lives by this principle.



When the heat becomes a test of endurance, another strength emerges: caring. In so-called “cooling networks,” families open their Families open their air-conditioned living rooms, share water, and look out for the most vulnerable. The heat affects everyone—but it isolates no one.

This is social dominance in action in the best sense of the word: the strength to take responsibility without elevating oneself above others. A state with attitude.

Messaging beyond Florida In a world increasingly marked by uncertainty, Florida sends a clear, human message: True strength is not demonstrated in resistance against others, but in solidarity with one another.

Stronger than the storm. More powerful than the heat. And carried by families who know that heart and attitude are the most stable foundations a society can have. Community as a survival skill

What has grown in Florida over generations is difficult to export, but very easy to understand: community here is not a romantic idea, but a learned survival skill. Anyone who lives in a region where nature regularly demonstrates its power quickly realizes that stability does not come from above but from within – from relationships between people.

This attitude is also evident beyond acute crises. In Florida's neighborhoods, people know each other. They know who needs help, who has just moved in, who lives alone, who has children.



This social closeness is no coincidence, but the result of a culture that has learned that anonymity is a luxury – and cohesion a necessity.

Here, people don't ask who is responsible. They are responsible themselves.

Florida sticks together because it has learned that individualism alone does not protect. Here, reliability counts more than distance, closeness more than indifference. The repeated challenges have shaped a collective self-image: We will get through this together. Not because it's easy. But because it's right.



Families as a supporting structure

Not because it is easy, but because it became necessary – and matured into strength.

The silent leadership of the many It is also striking that this strength is rarely tied to individuals. It is decentralized. Leadership arises situationally, pragmatically, often invisibly. Whoever is capable at the moment takes charge. Whoever needs help gets it. Roles change, hierarchies are flexible.

This prevents dependency and promotes self-efficacy. Everyone counts. Everyone can contribute. And this is precisely where a form of social dominance lies that arises not from power, but from responsibility.

A learning field for other societies Florida is not an ideal image. It is contradictory, challenging, sometimes harsh. But that is precisely why it offers a valuable learning field for other regions and societies facing similar crises.

Because what Florida shows is universal:

That community is not created by perfect conditions, but by overcoming challenges together.

That diversity becomes a strength when it is based on mutual respect.

And that families—in all their forms—are the most resilient units in a society.

So when the next storm hits or the heat takes its toll again, Florida will not be unprepared. Not because it has all the answers, but because it has the right foundation.

A foundation built on closeness rather than distance.

On responsibility rather than looking away. On heart and attitude. And perhaps that is precisely the most important message this state is sending to an uncertain world:



By Dina Veronique Scheve

Charity In a Dilemma – Why The Double Commandment of Love Remains Challenging To This Day

Sometimes simple images reveal deeper truths. The board game “Nine Men’s Morris” is one such example. Whoever puts their opponent in a dilemma forces them into a situation from which there is no escape: every move leads to defeat. It is precisely this image that helps us understand a central scene in the Gospel – and at the same time one of the most radical demands of the Christian faith.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is asked by a teacher of the law: “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the most important?” (Matthew 22:36). The question is not harmless. It is intended as a test, perhaps even a trap. For anyone who places one commandment above all others in Jewish law easily finds themselves in theological trouble. But Jesus does not stumble. His answer is as simple as it is overwhelming: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. (...) You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

With this answer, Jesus puts his interlocutor in a different kind of dilemma—not out of tactical cleverness, but out of theological depth. For there is no argument against love. Those who continue to question, continue to examine, continue to accuse, reveal themselves as people who do not act out of love. The double commandment of love undermines any pious sophistry. It is not an additional standard alongside others – it is the standard par excellence.

Love as the key to interpreting faith

The double commandment is not an invention of Jesus. It combines two central texts of the Torah: the Shema Israel from Deuteronomy (Dtn 6:5) and the commandment of love from the Book of Leviticus (Lev 19:18). What is new is not the content, but the indissoluble connection: love of God and love of neighbor cannot be separated. John later sums it up succinctly: “If you do not love your brother, whom you have seen, you cannot love God, whom you have not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

Thus, love becomes the key to interpreting the entire faith. All commandments, all religious practices, all church structures must be measured against this one question: Do they serve love—for God and for people? Or do they ultimately serve other interests: power, security, comfort, self-justification?

This question is uncomfortable because it is not abstract. It intrudes into everyday life, into very concrete decisions. And that is precisely where we see how demanding the double commandment of love really is.

A question of coffee—and justice

Let’s take a seemingly trivial example: coffee is needed in a restaurant. There is a wide selection. Do you go for the special offer from the supermarket because it’s easier on the wallet? Or do you consciously choose fair trade coffee from the One World Shop—more expensive, but with consideration for the people who grew it?

It is not a moral calculation with a clear solution. But it is a question of attitude. What message do we want to send? What message will stick? That the restaurant operator is primarily concerned with keeping costs down – or that they take global issues seriously and assume responsibility?

A bishop put it in similarly pointed terms at the consecration of a new church. He congratulated the congregation on their generosity, but then asked an uncomfortable question: what about the collections for Misericordia, Adveniat, and other charities during the same period? Could the congregation rejoice in their new house of worship while elsewhere necessary aid was lacking?

Such questions are not intended to assign blame, but to raise awareness. Charity is not an optional extra for the particularly committed. It belongs at the heart of Christian existence – even and especially where it comes at a cost.

“You shall not exploit the stranger”

The commandment to love becomes particularly acute when it comes to strangers. The Book of Exodus already states: “You shall not take advantage of or exploit a stranger” (Ex 22:20). The reason for this is remarkably simple: Israel knows what it means to be a stranger. It was itself a people without a homeland, dependent on the goodwill of others. This memory becomes a theological obligation: those who have experienced liberation themselves must not ignore suffering.

This insight is timeless. Migration, flight, exclusion—none of these are phenomena of the modern age. What is new, at most, is their media presence and political charge. The biblical question remains the same: How do we treat people who do not belong, who do not speak our language, who do not share our customs?

Pope Francis speaks of a “Church of the poor.” This is not a romantic ideal, but a question. Where is our place in the face of the refugees who come to us? What moves us – and what leaves us cold? And why?

A look at history can help. After World War II, Europe itself was dependent on help. Other countries responded to the need. They gave, shared, supported. In testimonies from that time, people look back and say, “This is how I was able to serve God by serving people.” This is precisely where the circle closes with the double commandment of love.

The enduring challenge

The double commandment of love repeatedly places us in a dilemma—not because it seeks to pin us down, but because it takes us seriously. It accepts no excuses, but also no resignation. It demands not perfection, but orientation.

Christian faith is not primarily demonstrated by correct answers, but by love in action. And this often begins in small ways: in decisions that no one controls, in attitudes that are not celebrated. Where we want to love God by loving people – and people because God loves them.

Perhaps that is precisely the liberating point of the double commandment: it makes us defenseless against love. And that is precisely where its power lies.

By Tobias Leinesser

Excellence – The Extra Mile That Changes Everything

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit” Aristotle

Excellence is not the problem.

The problem is how we talk about it.**
Because performance without purpose becomes a burden.
But performance driven by inner clarity – that’s what we call excellence.
Excellence doesn’t mean being perfect.
It means going beyond what’s expected – on purpose.

The Gift of Living Excellence

People who commit to something,
don’t become harder – they become clearer.
Not more driven – but more present.
And that presence is felt – in the atmosphere, in the teamwork, in the outcome.
Excellence isn’t a demand on others – it’s a quiet standard we hold for ourselves

What does excellence look like in real life?

It’s when someone doesn’t ask: “What do I have to do?”
But: “What can I contribute?”
It’s the extra mile –
not to impress others, but because it reflects your own values.
Excellence isn’t pressure – it’s awareness in action.

Societal Insight:

A culture that stops confusing excellence with pressure will become healthier, more creative, and more humane.
Because people want to make a difference – but not at the cost of their soul.
If we reconnect performance with purpose, we’ll shape a new work ethic:
The extra mile – walked by choice, not by obligation.

When performance becomes disconnected –

from meaning, joy, or connection – people burn out.**
But when people feel seen, when their work matters,
when they are allowed to grow, not just perform –
then performance becomes a form of dignity.

Reflection Prompts:

Where are you already giving more than expected – and what’s your reason?
What would shift if you saw your high standards not as a burden, but as a gift?

By Jutta Burmeister

Celebrating Life's Milestones with the Sunshine Post!

Honoring birthdays, anniveraries and special moments from our community!

We want to shine a spotlight on the people whose special days remind us why milestones matter.

Birthdays, anniversaries, and personal achievements mark the chapters of our shared story.

Join us in congratulating the friends, families, neighbors, and colleagues who are celebrating important moments in their lives.

Would you like to congratulate someone special?

Send us your request at

info@sunshine-post.com

and get featured in our

next issue!

Subject: "Celebrating Life"

The Sunshine Post Community wishes a Happy Birthday to....

Simon Boos

Regina INgrid Schwindt

Thomas Pruchnowski

Dennis Röhr

Eugen Vöhringer

Alexandra Kutz

Annett Post

Kilian Jäckel

Mike Frei

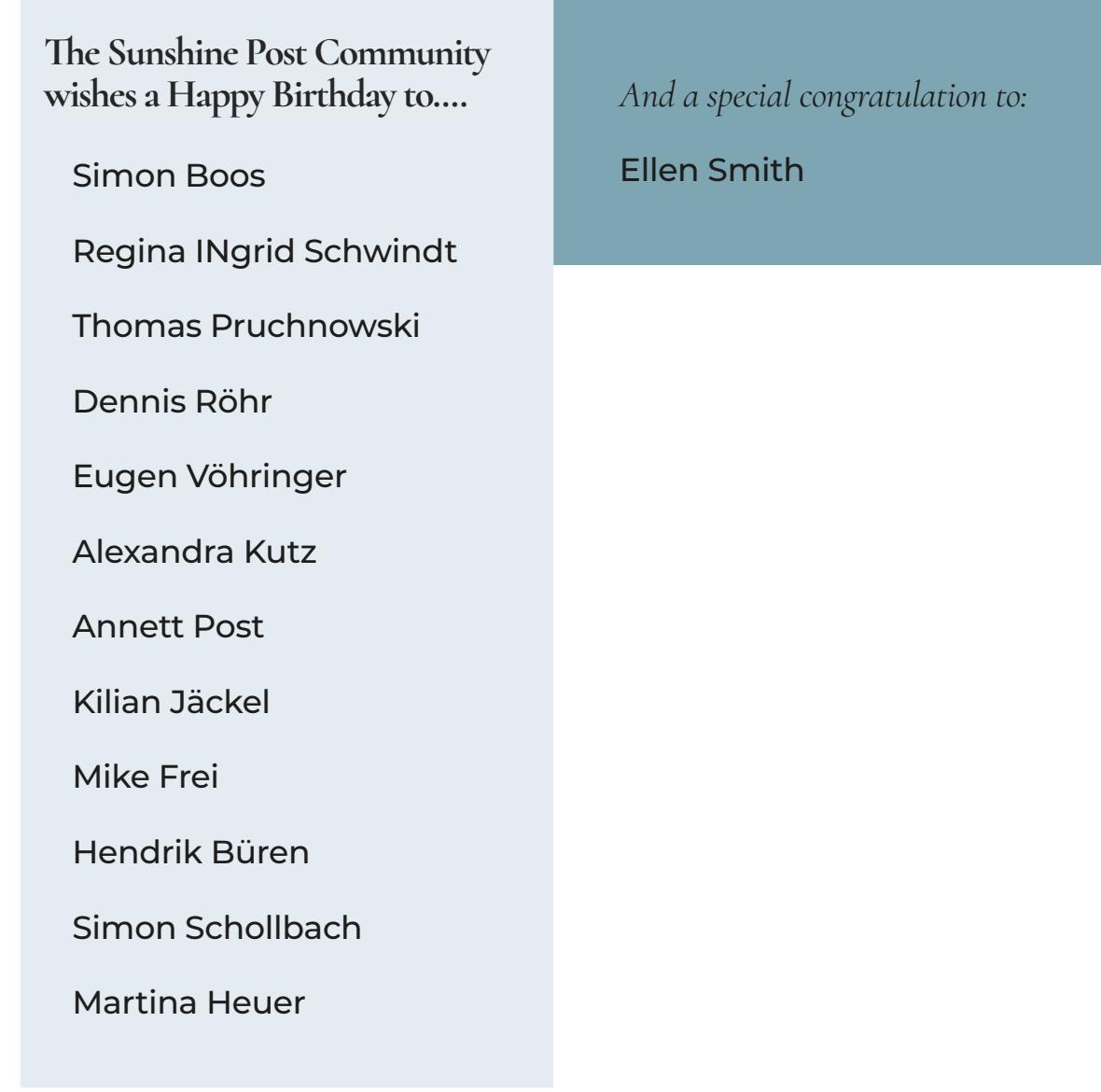
Hendrik Büren

Simon Schollbach

Martina Heuer

And a special congratulation to:

Ellen Smith



Caricature of the Month: February

The solution is close — Letting Go is a Choice



By DiSi, Sunshine Post Editorial Team



INVEST IN YOUR DREAMS

